

Remarks on Opening the Forest Conference in Portland, Oregon

April 2, 1993

Good morning. I want to thank every one of you who are in the room today and also all of those who are outside—and there are certainly many who have come here—for caring enough to be here.

We're here to discuss issues whose seriousness demands that we respect each other's concerns, each other's experiences, and each other's views. Together we can move beyond confrontation to build a consensus on a balanced policy to preserve jobs and to protect our environment.

I want to say a special word of thanks to Governor Roberts and Mayor Katz for hosting this conference, and Governors Lowrey, Wilson, and Andrus for attending.

As you can see, the Vice President and I are here with representatives from our administration who deal every day with virtually every issue which will be discussed. With us here today are the Interior Secretary, Bruce Babbitt; the Agriculture Secretary, Mike Espy; Labor Secretary Bob Reich, all of whom have been meeting with people here in the Northwest in recent weeks. We also have the Commerce Secretary, Ron Brown; Environmental Protection Administrator Carol Browner; the Deputy Budget Director Alice Rivlin; and our Science and Technology Adviser, Dr. John Gibbons.

We're all here to listen and to learn from you. We're here to discuss issues about which people feel strongly, believe deeply, and often disagree vehemently. That's because the issues are important and are related and intrinsic to the very existence of the people who live here in the Pacific Northwest.

We're discussing how people earn their livelihoods. We're discussing the air, the water, the forests that are important to your lives. And we're addressing the values that are at the core of those lives. From the trailblazers and the pioneers to the trapper and the hunters, the loggers and the mill workers, the people of the Northwest have earned their livings from the land and have lived in awe of the power, the majesty, and the beauty of the forests, the rivers, and the streams.

Coming from a State, as I do, that was also settled by pioneers and which is still 53 percent timberland—we have an important timber industry and people who appreciate the beauty and the intrinsic value of our woodlands—I've often felt at home here in the Northwest. I'll never forget the people I've met here over the last year-and-a-half whose lives have been touched by the issues that we're here to discuss. I remember the timber industry workers with whom I spoke at a town hall meeting in Seattle last July who invited me to come to their communities and learn about their problems.

I remember the families from the timber industry whom I met last September in Max Groesbeck's backyard in Eugene, Oregon. I was moved beyond words by the stories that people told me there and by their determination to fight for their communities and their companies and their families.

I was also inspired by Frank Henderson, who had lost his job as a timber worker and gone through retraining to learn thermo-plastic welding and now owns a plastics welding business of his own. He was a guest of mine at the Inaugural, and I'm glad to have him here with us today.

And I remember Elizabeth Bailey of Hayfork, California. She's 11 years old and she was one of the girls and boys who visited me at the White House a few Saturdays ago to participate in our televised townhall meeting for children. Her parents, Willie and Nadine Bailey, have had to close their timber business because, in the past, politics seemed to matter more than people or the environment. And I'm glad that Nadine Bailey, a dedicated spokesperson for lawyers, is also here with us today.

As I've spoken with people who work in the timber industry I've been impressed by their love of the land. As one worker told me at our meeting in the Groesbecks' backyard, "I care about Oregon a lot, the beauty of the country."

We're fortunate to have people with us today who bring not only a variety of experiences but a variety of views to the questions before the conference: How can we achieve a balanced and comprehensive policy that recognizes the importance of the forests and timber to the economy and jobs of this re-

gion? And how can we preserve our precious old-growth forests which are part of our national heritage and that, once destroyed, can never be replaced?

For too long, the National Government has done more to confuse the issues than to clarify them. In the absence of real leadership, at least six different Federal Agencies have hooked their horses to different sides of the cart, and then they've wondered why the cart wouldn't move forward. To make things worse, the rhetoric from Washington has often exaggerated and exacerbated the tensions between those who speak about the economy and those who speak about the environment.

Not surprisingly, these issues have very often ended up in court while the economy, the environment, and the people have all suffered. That's why it's so important that the people here today are meeting in a conference room, not a courtroom. Whatever your views, everyone who will speak today comes from the Northwest and will have to live with the results of whatever decisions we all make.

We're here to begin a process that will help ensure that you will be able to work together in your communities, for the good of your businesses, your jobs, and your natural environment. The process we begin today will not be easy. Its outcome cannot possibly make everyone happy. Perhaps it won't make anyone completely happy. But the worst thing we can do is nothing. As we begin this process, the most important thing we can do is to admit, all of us to each other, that there are no simple or easy answers.

This is not about choosing between jobs and the environment but about recognizing the importance of both and recognizing that virtually everyone here and everyone in this region cares about both. After all, nobody appreciates the natural environment more than the working people who depend upon it for fishing, for boating, for teaching their children to respect the land, the rivers, and the forests. And most environmentalists are working people and business people themselves, and understand that only an economically secure America can have the strength and confidence necessary to preserve our land, our water and our forests, as you can

see in how badly they're despoiled in nations that are not economically secure.

A healthy economy and a healthy environment are not at odds with each other. They are essential to each other. Here in the Northwest, as in my own home State, people understand that healthy forests are important for a healthy forest-based economy; understand that if we destroy our old growth forest, we'll lose jobs in salmon fishing and tourism and, eventually, in the timber industry as well. We'll destroy recreational opportunities in hunting and fishing for all and eventually make our communities less attractive.

We all understand these things. Let's not be afraid to acknowledge them and to recognize the simple but powerful truth that we come here today less as adversaries than as neighbors and coworkers. Let's confront problems, not people.

Today I ask all of you to speak from your hearts, and I ask you to listen and strive to understand the stories of your neighbors. We're all here because we want a healthy economic environment and a healthy natural environment, because we want to end the divisions here in the Northwest and the deadlock in Washington.

If we commit today to move forward together, we can arrive at a balanced solution and put the stalemate behind us. Together, we can make a new start.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. at the Oregon Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Governor Barbara Roberts of Oregon, Governor Mike Lowry of Washington, Governor Cecil D. Andrus of Idaho, and Mayor Vera Katz of Portland.

Remarks Concluding the First Roundtable Discussion of the Forest Conference in Portland

April 2, 1993

I'm going to refrain until the afternoon session from getting into the specifics of what we ought to do. But I'd like to say something to the people who were on this panel that talked about the human impact of the present conditions.